

Development Control Committee
Meeting to be held on 2 March 2022

Electoral Division affected: Lancaster Central

Lancaster City: application number. LCC/2021/0056

Change of use of Building no.2 from place of worship to office space, replacement windows to Building no. 2 and the link corridor, external metal stairs, installation of external air source heat pumps and demolition of existing toilet block to be replaced by a two storey extension at White Cross Business Park, South Road, Lancaster

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Executive Summary

Application - Change of use of Building no. 2 from place of worship to office space. replacement windows to Building no. 2 and the link corridor, external metal stairs, installation of external air source heat pumps and demolition of existing toilet block to be replaced by a two storey extension at White Cross Business Park, South Road, Lancaster

Recommendation – Summary

That planning permission be **granted** subject to conditions controlling time limits, working programme, building materials, control of demolition operations, details of heat pump enclosures and electric vehicle charging points.

Applicant's Proposal

The application is for the change of use of Building no. 2 on the White Cross Business Park, Lancaster from a place of worship to office space. The proposal would create two floors of office accommodation totalling approximately 430 sq metres in area.

In order to convert the building to an office use various building works are also proposed including:

- Replacement windows to Building no. 2 and the link corridor.
- External metal stairs.
- The demolition of the existing toilet block to be replaced by a two storey extension. The new extension would measure 5.07m x 6.14 m and 7.25m tall and would provide new toilet and kitchen facilities.
- New glazed porch to the west elevation of Building no.2.

- Installation of four air source heat pumps to provide a supply of renewable energy. These would be housed within an acoustic enclosure measuring approximately 4 metres by 4 metres by 2.5 metres in height. The walls of the enclosure would be coloured mid grey.

The building can be accessed from either an existing link corridor or at a lower level from the main White Cross reception. As the link corridor connects Building no.2 to the other areas on White Cross there is a proposal to upgrade the corridor as part of the refurbishment including replacement windows, doors and infill panels and a new timber porch to cover the entrance steps.

The application also originally included provision for the installation of photovoltaic panels on the west and south facing elevations of the roof. These have now been withdrawn from the application.

Description and Location of Site

The proposed development is located within the White Cross Business Park off South Road to the south of Lancaster City Centre with a total of 400,000 sq. ft of office space to rent and around 130 businesses on site. South Road (A6) is to the west of the business park and provides access to the site via White Cross Road which is a private road that leads to the shared car park for the wider complex. To the north of the site is the Lancaster Canal and the nearest residential properties.

The barracks building at White Cross is a grade II listed building and the Chapel building (Building no. 2) subject to this planning application is a non-designated heritage asset. The Chapel building is approximately 5 metres from the barracks building.

The site is within Lancaster City Conservation Area.

Background

History

Building no. 2 was originally recorded as Storey Social Club which was converted to a place of worship and more recently the space lies vacant.

Planning permission was granted at White Cross in February 2020 for the change of use from restaurant to workshop units (ref LCC/2019/0067).

Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Paragraphs 11-14, 55-58, 81, 130 and 189 – 208 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) are relevant with regards to the requirement for sustainable development, building a strong competitive economy, design, planning conditions and impacts on heritage assets.

Lancaster Local Plan – Strategic Policies and Land Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD)

Policy EC1 – Established Employment Area
Policy EN9 – Air Quality Management Area
Policy SP4 – Priorities for sustainable Economic Growth
Policy SP5 – Delivery of New Jobs

Lancaster Local Plan – Development Management Development Plan Document (DPD) July 2020

Policy DM29 – Key Design Principles
Policy DM30 – Sustainable Design
Policy DM14 – Proposals involving Employment and Premises
Policy DM31 – Air Quality Management and Pollution
Policy DM37 - Development Affecting Listed Buildings
Policy DM38 – Development affecting Conservation Areas
Policy DM39 – Setting of Designated Heritage Assets
Policy DM41 – Development affecting non-designated heritage or their settings
Policy DM53 – Renewable and low carbon energy generation

Consultations

Lancaster City Council – Object over concerns the heritage assets at White Cross would be harmed by the proposed external alterations. The City Council also consider that a bat survey should be completed before works commence. To support biodiversity net gain, a habitat improvement or creation plan should be implemented. Also to prevent undue impacts on local air quality and noise, conditions relating to Electric Vehicle chargers, demolition/dust management and plant/equipment are recommended.

The City Council's Conservation Officer has commented in detail in relation to the heritage issues and considers :-

- That the proposed uPVC windows would be harmful to the setting of the listed building.
- The installation of the photovoltaic arrays on the west facing pitch of the chapel building would be particularly harmful to the setting of the adjacent listed building.
- The proposed toilet block is larger than the existing facility and would have a greater impact on the non-designated heritage asset. The addition of stone to the render would best respect the heritage setting.

A number of other detailed comments are made with regard to the porch design and to the detail of the new cladding and glazing.

Lancashire County Council (LCC) Highways Development Control – No objection. However, they request a condition for a Construction Management Plan to be submitted before the development starts.

Historic England – No comments received.

Canal and River Trust – No comments received.

Ecology – Initial objection relating to potential impacts on bats with the installation of solar panels on the roof of Building no. 2 and requested bat surveys to be carried out prior to determination of the planning application.

Representations – The application has been advertised by site notice, and neighbouring residents informed by individual letter. One representation has been received from an occupier of an adjacent office unit concerned over the potential increase in noise levels from the proposed air source heat pump and disruption caused through construction works.

Advice

Lancashire County Developments Ltd and Lancashire County Council are currently in the process of reviewing the vacant buildings within White Cross Business Park, to create spaces for growing small businesses. Building no.2 was originally recorded as Storey Social Club which was converted to a place of worship and more recently lies vacant. Due to its proximity to Fraser House, which is the most recent building on the Business Park to be refurbished, Building no. 2 has been identified for further development and conversion to office space.

The change of use of this building would create two floors of office accommodation. To convert the former chapel building into office space various building works are required to offer a modern and energy efficient office environment. These works include replacement of all the old timber windows with modern alternatives, installation of air source heat pumps and photovoltaic panels, a two storey extension to provide kitchen and toilet facilities on both floors and a number of other additions and modifications to the building.

Paragraph 81 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that planning decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt and that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth. The works to Building no. 2 (the Chapel) will offer new office space for businesses in the area allowing growing companies to stay in Lancaster rather than move away from the city and would allow a building which is currently vacant to be converted to a modern office environment suitable for a variety of businesses and would therefore meet the above aims of Government policy.

Due to the scale of the proposal it is not expected that the change of use of the building would change or add significantly to traffic movements into White Cross Business Park. Lancashire County Council Highways Development Control raise no objection to the proposal commenting that the proposals should have a negligible impact on highway safety and highway capacity within the immediate vicinity of the site. The whole of the White Cross site including the buildings subject to this application is allocated as established employment area by policy EC1 of the Lancaster City Strategic Policies and Land Allocations DPD. In addition, the building is sited close to Lancaster City centre which is a highly sustainable location with good access to public

transport, car parks and local amenities and is therefore in compliance with policy DM14 of the Lancaster City Local Plan.

It is considered that the change of use of the building would not cause any harm or loss of significance of the heritage asset. There would be no unacceptable planning impacts arising from the change of use of the building to an office.

The main issue relates to the alterations and new building works that are required to improve the energy efficiency of the building and how these proposals may impact on the adjacent Grade II listed Barracks building and also Building no. 2 which is a non-designated asset due to its strong architectural character. The development site also lies within the Canal Corridor South character area of the Lancaster Conservation Area. The canal corridor is characterised mostly by its mills and former industrial buildings. The development site therefore contributes to this character through its former use as a mill and administrative building.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 203 states that when weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset. In relation to the designated heritage assets (the adjacent listed building and the wider conservation area), paragraph 202 requires that where a development would lead to less than substantial harm, the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including where appropriate securing its optimum viable use.

Policy DM41 of the Lancaster City Council Development Management Development Plan Document (DPD) states that any extensions or alterations to a Non Designated Heritage Asset should be designed sympathetically, without detracting from or competing with the heritage asset. Proposals should relate appropriately in terms of siting, style, scale, massing, height and materials.

The main heritage issues raised by the various building works are as follows:

- Part of the application includes the demolition of a painted breeze block toilet block which would be replaced with a two storey toilet / kitchen block with disabled access. The elevations of the proposed block would be off white render with a pitched slate roof. A new metal escape stair would replace the existing spiral staircase and would be coloured black to match existing. It is considered that the use of a pitched slate roof enhances the group setting of the heritage assets compared to the existing flat, bitumen roof. The existing block is an intrusive feature, and the proposed design is more in keeping with the design of the adjacent Building no 2. To provide further enhancement and to address the comments of the City Council's Conservation Officer, the proposal also now incorporates stone headers and cills to the windows of the toilet block and a stone plinth to the building. The windows themselves would be in white uPVC in a heritage sash design which are considered acceptable given that the toilet block would be sited within an internal courtyard area and not readily visible from the listed building.

- Building 2 can be accessed from either the link corridor or on a lower level across from White Cross reception. As the link corridor connects Building no. 2 to other areas on White Cross there is a proposal to upgrade this access as part of the refurbishment. It is proposed to replace the existing single pane brown link corridor windows with Grey Aluminium powder coated windows. The wooden infill panels between these windows would be replaced with grey wood style infill panels. The Lancaster City Council Conservation team support the refurbishment of the link corridor as the materials would be of higher quality than the existing and would therefore enhance the setting of the listed building.
- The proposal seeks to replace all the existing timber framed windows throughout Building no.2 with uPVC. The existing windows are in poor condition and are single glazed and the new windows are proposed in order to improve the energy efficiency of the building. The Conservation officer at Lancaster City Council objects to this element of the proposal and is concerned that uPVC windows would be an intrusive feature within the Conservation Area and as the chapel (Building no.2) is immediately adjacent to the listed building, the use of uPVC would be harmful to its setting in addition to the character of the Conservation Area. The City Council recommend repairing the existing timber frames or amending the design to use hardwood timber.

It is accepted that hard wood timber windows would be the choice of window for the proposal. However, there are approximately 15 windows that require replacement and those to the front of the building on White Cross Street are large in scale with a multi paned sash design with distinctive arched tops. The applicant therefore proposes the use of uPVC on cost grounds. The repair of the windows has been discounted as this would not properly address the energy efficiency issues that have been identified. In order to address the concerns of the City Council, the applicant has submitted further details of the design of the proposed uPVC windows which have been designed to address the heritage issues on this site. The City Council have been consulted on these proposals and their response is awaited. It is considered that as replacement of the windows is necessary there is no issue with the principle of this aspect of the development and the only remaining point of discussion is the choice of materials and detailed design. It is therefore considered that this matter can be made the subject of a planning condition to require design and materials to be approved prior to any replacement of the windows taking place.

- The planning application originally included installation of solar photo voltaic panels on the west and south facing roofs of the Chapel building in order to provide a source of renewable electricity to the building. The City Council objected to these aspects of the development due to the impacts on the setting of the adjacent listed buildings. It is considered that the City Council's objections to the panels on the west facing roof of the building are valid as that elevation directly faces the listed building. The applicant therefore withdrew the west facing panels from the application. In relation to the south facing roof, this part of the site is less prominent and therefore there is no heritage or design issue why solar panels should not be placed on this part of the roof. However, no bat survey information was submitted with the application and due to the possible impacts of the panels on the existing slate roof which might provide bat roosting opportunities, this element of the

proposal can only be determined once a full bat survey has been submitted. The proposals for the solar panels have therefore been withdrawn from the current application and the panels on the south facing roof will be the subject of a further planning application once the bat survey has been undertaken.

- Air source heat pumps are proposed to be installed to provide heating for the building and this is a suitable approach to take to reduce carbon emissions. A concern over potential noise levels was raised by an existing business using offices near to where the proposed heat pump will be located. The air source heat pumps would be located within an enclosure. Whilst these pumps can produce some noise, it is considered that noise levels would not be unacceptable, and a condition can be imposed regarding the design of the enclosure in order to further reduce any noise levels complying with Policies DM29 and DM31 Lancaster City Council Development Management Document (DPD).

The City Council have commented that any permission should be subject to a condition requiring one Electric Vehicle (EV) charging point. The applicant has confirmed that there are no Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points included within the application. However, the developer is currently preparing an Electric Vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure scheme for the White Cross site as a whole. Although no changes to the car park are proposed, this proposal does provide for an increase in office space at this site and therefore it is considered that this matter should be the subject of a planning condition

In summary, the proposed development would allow a currently vacant building to be converted to an employment use which would have local economic benefits. The proposed building works are required to allow a modern standard of office accommodation and to improve the energy efficiency of the building therefore helping to address climate change objectives. The site does have a number of heritage designations. However, it is considered that the works would have a less than substantial impact on the heritage value of the designated conservation assets and any impacts would be outweighed by the benefits of bringing the building back into active use and the economic and environmental benefits that would be realised. Subject to conditions controlling building materials and the design and materials for the windows, the proposal is therefore considered acceptable in relation to the policies of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Development Plan.

In view of the scale, location and nature of the development, it is considered that no Convention Rights set out in the Human Rights Act 1998 would be affected.

Recommendation

That planning permission be Granted subject to the following conditions:

Time Limits

1. The development shall commence not later than 3years from the date of this permission.

Reason: Imposed pursuant to Section 91 (1)(a) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Working Programme

2. The development shall be carried out, except where modified by the conditions to this permission, in accordance with the following documents:

- a) The Planning Application and supporting statement received by the County Planning Authority on 24 September 2021
- b) Submitted Plans and documents:

Drawing LCC-XX-ZZ-DR-A-70-60-0200 Rev S2-C1 - Existing site plan
Drawing LCC-XX-ZZ-DR-A-70-30-0002 Rev D1 -C4 - Proposed Elevations
Drawing LCC-XX-ZZ-DR-A-70-60-60 -0020 Rev S2-C1- Proposed WC Extension

- c) All schemes and programmes approved in accordance with this permission.

Reason: To minimise the impact of the development on the amenities of the area and to conform with Policy DM31, DM36 and DM41 Lancaster City Council Development Management Document

3. No development shall commence until details of the materials to be used for the cills and headers of the toilet block extension and for the stone plinth at the base of this building have been submitted to the County Planning Authority for approval in writing.

The construction of the building shall use the building materials contained in the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that the windows are of an appropriate design and materials and to conform with policies DM30 and DM41 of the Lancaster City Local Plan.

4. No replacement of the windows shall take place until details of each of the replacement windows have been submitted to and approved in writing by the County Planning Authority. The details shall include information on the construction material and design of the frames and glazing bars and colours for each of the windows.

The provisions of this condition shall not apply to the windows within the proposed toilet block extension.

Reason: To ensure that the windows are of an appropriate design and materials and to conform with policies DM30 and DM41 of the Lancaster City Local Plan.

5. Notwithstanding the details shown on Drawing LCC-XX-ZZ-DR-A-70-30-0002 Rev D1 -C4, this permission shall not permit the installation of the solar photovoltaics (PV) panels on the south facing roof of the building.

Reason: In the interests of nature conservation and to conform with Policy DM44 of the Lancaster City Local Plan.

6. Measures shall be undertaken during any demolition works to minimise the generation of dust.

Reason: To minimise the adverse impact on local air quality and local amenity and to comply with Policies DM29 and DM31 of the Lancaster City Council Development Management Document (DPD).

7. The air source heat pumps shown on Drawing LCC-XX-ZZ-DR-A-70-30-0002 Rev D1 -C4 shall not be installed until details of the design and construction of the acoustic enclosures have been submitted to and approved in writing by the County Planning Authority.

The enclosures shall be constructed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that noise is minimised in the interests of the amenity of the area and to comply with policies DM29 and DM31 of the Lancaster City Council Development Management Document (DPD).

8. The office units shall not be brought into use until details for the installation of electric vehicle charging points within the car park serving the White Cross site have been installed in accordance with a scheme to be first submitted to and approved in writing by the County Planning Authority. The scheme shall contain details of the number, design and location of charging points to be installed.

The charging points contained in the approved scheme shall be installed prior to the new office space being brought into use.

Reason: To secure the provision of sustainable transport modes and to conform with Policy DM62 of the Lancaster City Local Plan.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Directorate/Ext
LCC/2021/0056	27/09/21	Susan Hurst, Planning and Environment 01772 534181

Reason for Inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A